

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 14, 2013

Agenda Item: Closure extension for Blackfoot River and Clark Fork River Bank at Milltown

Division: Parks

Action Needed: Tentative approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

Cleanup and restoration of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers associated with the Milltown Dam Superfund site was completed in the summer of 2012. In 2006, the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Commission authorized the closure of short stretches of the two rivers for roughly five years. In 2011, the Commission extended the closure on the two rivers for an additional two years, with a tentative reopening set for July 1, 2013.

The lower Blackfoot River poses numerous human-made hazards for river recreationists. The Interstate 90 bridge piers and the remnants of the Bonner Dam pose significant hazards to river recreationists and until an appropriate hazard removal and risk management plan/strategy is developed by FWP and other state partners, we believe this reach of the Blackfoot River should remain closed as we make progress.

On the Clark Fork River, restoration work is complete and project managers with the Natural Resource Damage Program believe the closure of the river to floating is no longer necessary but recommend that restored areas on the river bank remain closed and that floater access to the floodplain be restricted to gravel bars along the river until such time that vegetation is better established.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Parks Division will conduct a 30-day comment period and invite the public to provide input on the proposed extension of the Blackfoot River closure and closure of the Clark Fork River bank while reopening the river on May 1, 2013.

Alternatives and Analysis

No Action Alternative: Blackfoot River closure extension: Do not extend the closure of the Blackfoot River beyond the current expiration date of July 1, 2013 and allow floating without addressing hazards. Clark Fork River reopening: Do not rescind closure on the Clark Fork River to floaters and allow existing closure to expire on July 1, 2013.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the extending the closure of the lower Blackfoot River, from the Weigh Station FAS to the downstream side of the I-90 bridges. FWP also recommends rescinding the closure to floating on the Clark Fork River to allow float-through access and to restrict river bank access to gravel bars only. All remaining closed areas along the river will be properly posted and signed.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission propose a biennial rule to extend the closure on the lower Blackfoot for floating and swimming but allow bank access until July 1, 2015; and propose a biennial rule to close the river bank on the Clark Fork River to public access with the exception of gravel bars while opening the river to floating on May 1, 2013.